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## A FEAST-DAY IN A MEXICAN VILLAGE

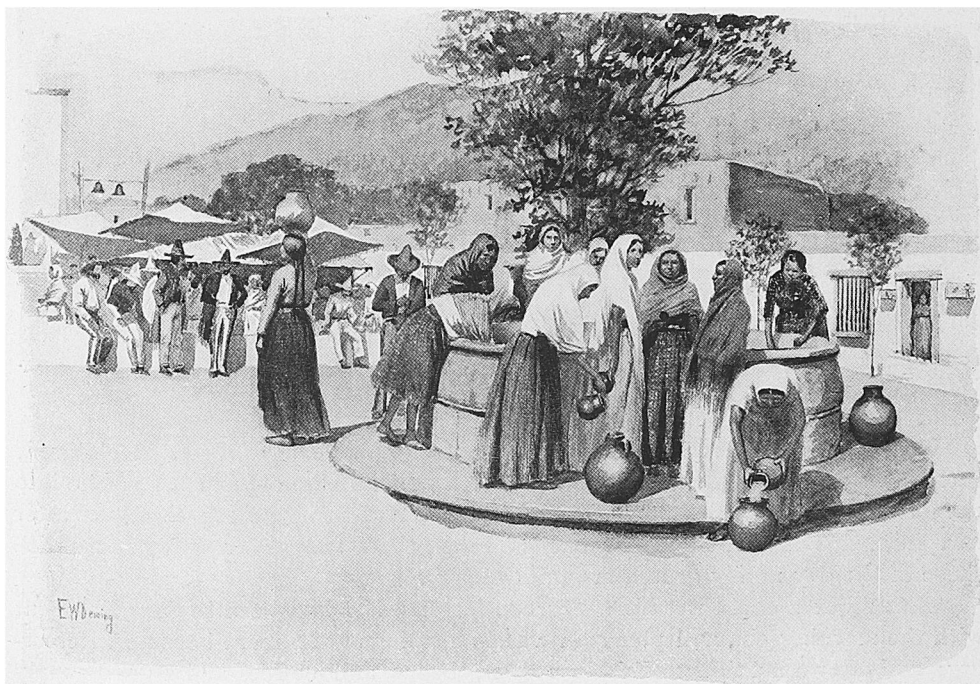
BY E. W. DEMING

*With original illustrations by the author.*

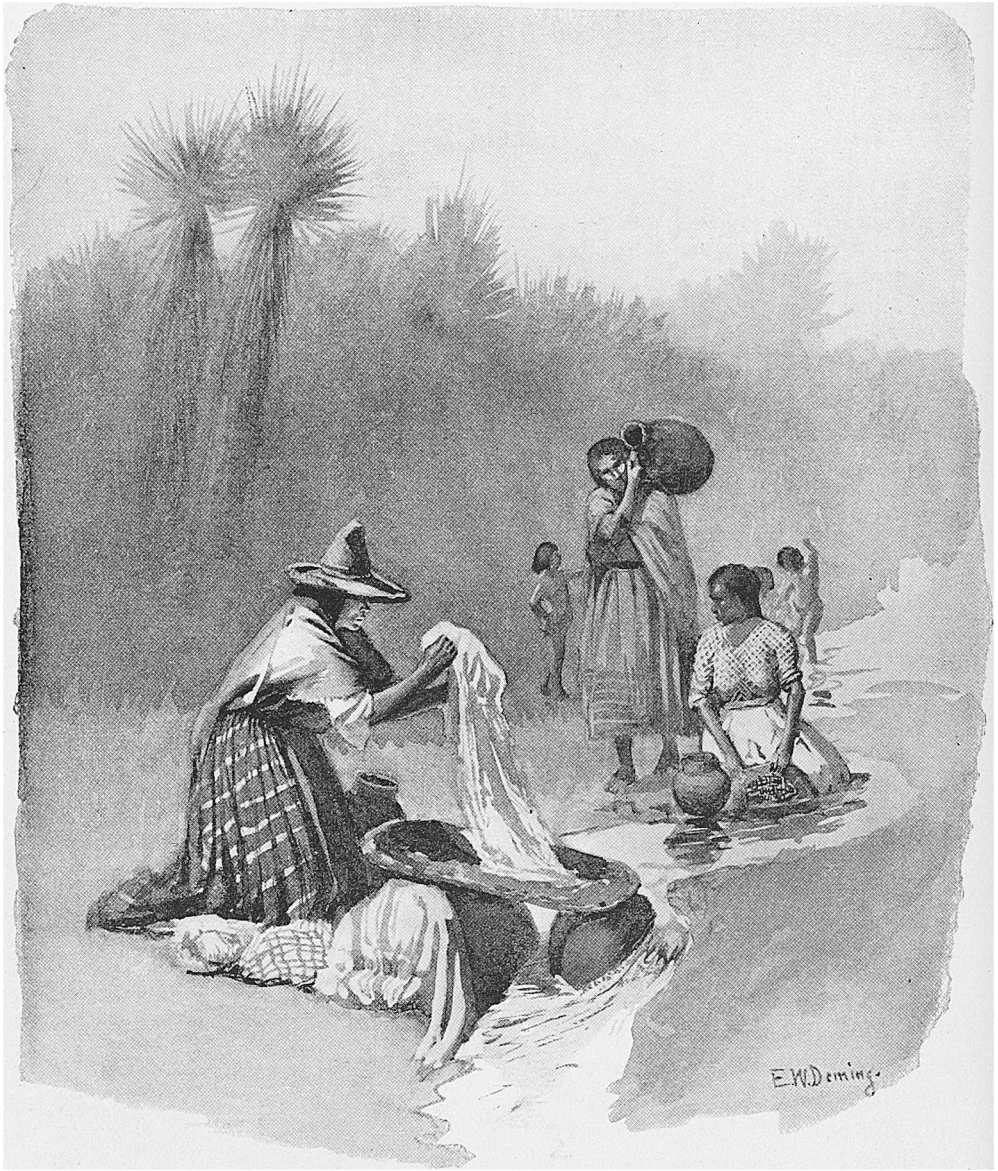
THE day's stage-ride from the railway station to the little Mexican mining-village in the mountains and fastnesses of the State of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, had been so wearisome that I was in poor condition to enjoy the novel sights that met my eyes as we approached the pueblo, yet every quarter-mile brought something fresh to arouse my jaded interest.

We rode down the last cañon as the setting sun cast long shadows and gilded quaint old houses nestling among the fig trees. The pueblo is surrounded by high mountains, so that it is not surprising to learn that formerly it was a noted stronghold of bandits; and through the middle runs a slender water-course, having small gardens of vegetables along both margins. Indian women were washing clothes or filling jars on the banks, and nude children were playing in the water which sparkled on their little brown bodies.

We passed peons returning to their homes with burros laden with wood, food and various other commodities; also great two-wheeled carts, drawn by from twelve to eighteen little mules, and loaded with coke for the blast-furnaces; and oxen dragging patiently by their horns immense covered carts containing provisions. Now and then came a peon afoot, traveling at a long swinging trot, perhaps having just made fifty or seventy-five miles, and seeming no more exhausted than if he had come but five.



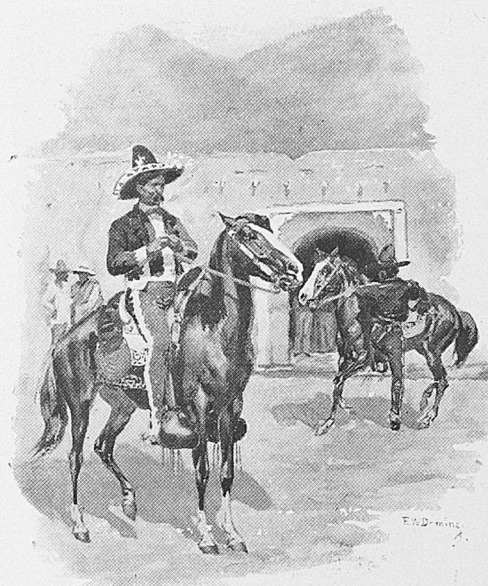
WOMEN AT THE FOUNTAIN IN THE PLAZA



THE PUBLIC LAUNDRY

In front of the little *jacals* were groups of Indian men, women and children, eating their evening meal around fires which sent up blue columns of smoke into the gathering twilight. A gang of prisoners was marching back to prison after carrying loads of stone on their backs all day, their faces contrasting sadly with those of the gay family groups around the fires.

That night I could not have felt comfortable if I had been in Paradise; but with the morning sun and plenty of vaseline, things once more became interesting; and after a breakfast of *chili con carne*, beans and coffee, and a good supply of water to take the pepper out of my throat (which, by the way, it does not do),



A RANCHERO

and here and there a vender of cakes, candied figs, or other fruit, was reaping a harvest of big copper centavos. Around the sides of the plaza were venders of pottery, vegetables, etc., each stock sheltered under a home-made umbrella and each making a complete little picture. Along the wall inclosing the plaza were groups of peons lazily talking, while they sunned themselves and smoked corn-husk cigarettes.

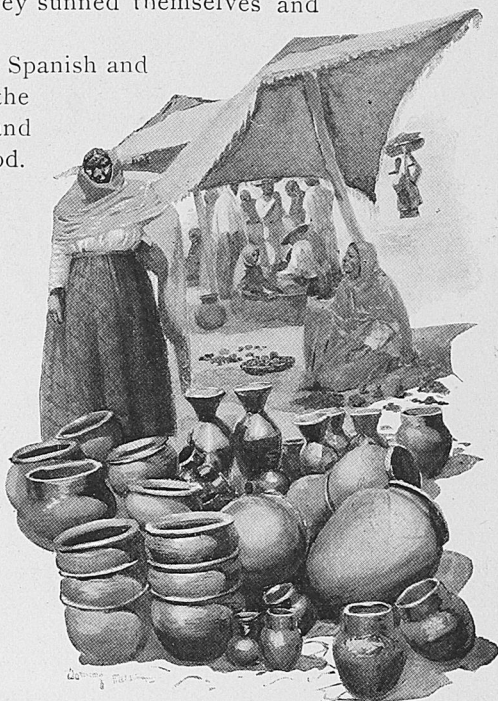
There is a curious blending of the Spanish and Indian in the costumes and faces of the peons, but the Indian predominates, and many show no signs of Spanish blood. The men are small and bright-eyed, with sharply cut features and hairy faces, and all are well built with broad shoulders, deep chests, and shapely arms and legs. They are fierce-looking chaps—in fact, many of them in this and other villages in this section have until lately been bandits. They wear sombreros, white cotton shirts, white trousers, and often add an outer pair of yellow buckskin, open at the sides and showing the white ones underneath. On their feet are sandals and the ever-present serape covers their shoulders.

The peon women have, even more than the men, the appearance of Indians, partly on account of their

I felt better and took a stroll about the quaint old pueblo of Concepcion del Oro.

It happened to be a feast-day and the plaza was full of people doing nothing in various ways. All seemed good-natured and kept up a continual laughter and chatter, for much business as well as amusement was being carried on out of doors.

About the fountain in the centre of the plaza, were groups of women filling with water large red jars, which they gracefully poised on their heads and then carried off with a natural beauty of motion unknown to their more civilized sisters. Occasionally a man would approach the fountain with two large jars, hanging from the ends of a pole carried over his shoulder;



THE VENDER OF EARTHENWARE

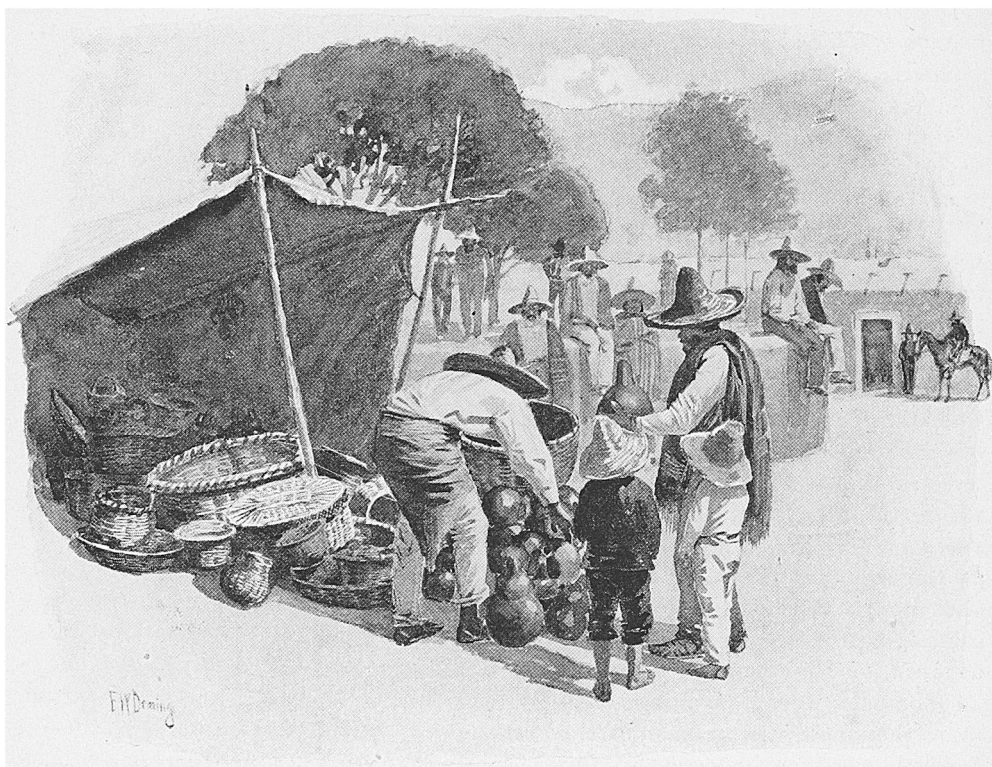


wearing the hair braided down their backs, Indian fashion. Many of the younger women are quite attractive in features and nearly all have fine figures; but Father Time deals rather roughly with them, and by the time they are twenty-eight or thirty they look middle-aged and have left only a suggestion of their former attractiveness, while the life of exposure and toil they lead hurries them on to old age and turns them prematurely into wrinkled women. They wear loose dresses of colored calico or white muslin, throwing over their heads a blue or grey mantilla, and occasionally one sees them with a man's hat on. Their feet are shod with a callous pair of soles—seldom anything else.

The women carry their babies on their backs, held there by a shawl, which is passed around the baby and over the woman's shoulder, and tied in a knot on her breast. Many little children were running about, encumbered in a like manner with a little brother or sister, apparently not in the least inconvenienced by their load, and usually several of them to-



THE OLD CANDLE-MAKER

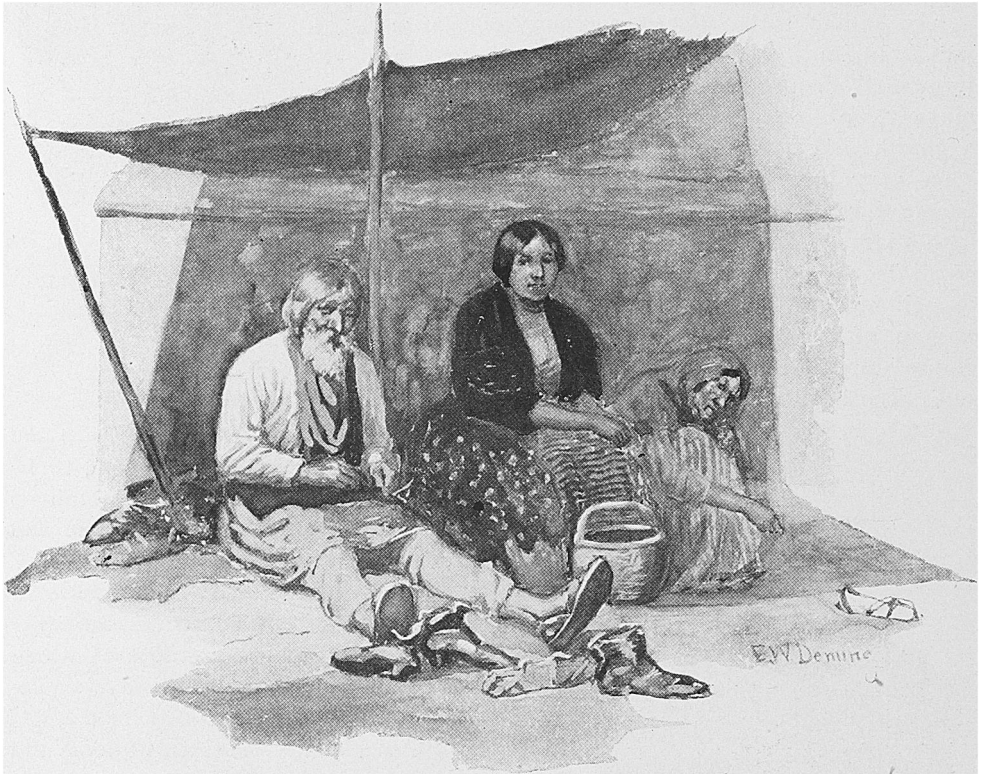


A SUNNY MORNING IN THE MARKET

gether, as busy gambling away their pennies as were their fathers and big brothers.

You are much impressed with the artistic results that these people succeed in getting in their wares. The desire to do something artistic seems to be uppermost in their minds, and yet I am sure that they are entirely unconscious of any such intention. Art is intuitive with them, is manifest even in the careless draping of their serapes and mantillas.

Their jars and baskets are especially good in form. Some of the jars are patterned after the conventional Spanish shapes, others show the Indian. Their habit of following the forms of certain vegetables, gourds, squashes, etc., probably points backward to a time when they had only gourds and similar vegetable shells for holding fluids, and began to coat them with mud to prevent them from



THE SANDAL-MAKER AND HIS FAMILY

burning when placed over a fire. They gradually learned that they could make clay vessels without the vegetable support inside, but have never quite abandoned the traditional shape.

In one corner of the plaza, a great pile of baskets and gourds was presided over by a boy, who darted out from under his awning every time a possible customer came near, and attempted to cajole him into buying some of his wares. The baskets were of all sizes and forms, and nicely made from palm-spines or willow-twigs; the gourds were for drinking-cups, water-bottles, etc. Under one awning an old man, with his wife and daughter, was mending shoes and making sandals. His outfit was very simple, consisting of a knife, an awl, thread made

from the *techiquia*, a raw-hide, and some scraps of leather. When a customer came for a pair of sandals, the old shoemaker placed the man's foot on the raw-hide, marked its shape with his awl, cut out this piece, made a few holes in which to put the strap, and was then ready for the next customer.

There was a constant arrival of rustic peddlers, some carrying great loads of their wares on their backs, supported by a strap across the breast or forehead; others allowing their wives or burros to carry the loads for them.

An Indian with a burro, carrying four large jars containing *pulque* (the beer of Mexico, a fermented drink made from the juice of the maguey, or aloe), stopped in the crowd, took out a gourd, and commenced business, which was soon very brisk, as the sun was hot and the people thirsty. The next arrival was an Indian with a large basket on his head, filled with melons of all degrees of greenness, which he proceeded to sell without compunction. All day an old woman of goodly proportions, and with a fat, good-natured face, stood patiently out in the hot sun, occasionally making known, in the voice of



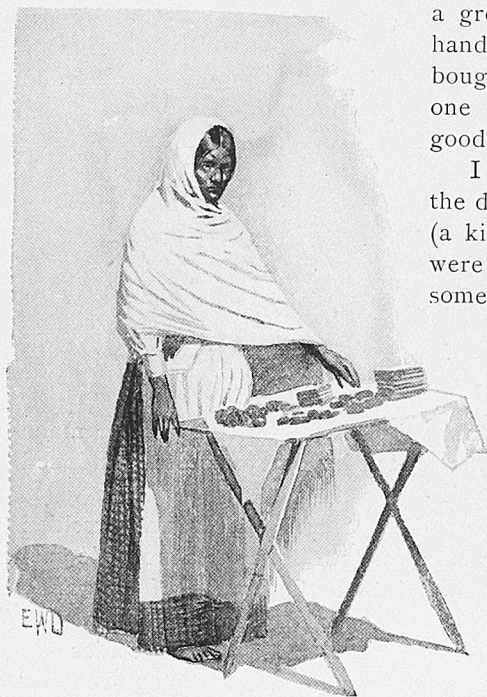
A PEDDLER OF PULQUE

a grenadier, the attractiveness, strength and handiness of her various pots and jars, to be bought at great bargains; and, although no one seemed to buy them, her patience and good nature never failed.

I indulged my curiosity as to the taste of the different kinds of candied fruits, figs, *tuna* (a kind of prickly-pear), etc., most of which were very palatable, though not always wholesome to an untrained system.

Occasionally the rattle of hoofs and jingling of spurs announced the arrival of a *ranchero*, or possibly of two or three, racing up the rocky street, men and horses all accoutered in silver and leather, and the cavaliers sitting their horses as none but these *rancheros* can. Each was followed by his *mozo*, or groom, who took charge of the horse, loosened its girth, and walked the animal around until it cooled off.

Mingling with other noises was a frequent clanging of the Mission bells,



A CAKE-STAND IN THE PLAZA



which hung near the ground on a pole, and were vigorously pounded by peon boys. The old missions present an extremely fine appearance from the outside. The architecture is very simple and dignified, and the color, originally painted white, has changed to various tints with time and exposure. The church-goers were principally women and children, with here and there an old man who was probably trying to rid himself of the ghosts of the sins of his

bandit days before making his final settlement. I was much disappointed with the interior of the church, which was over-decorated and not nearly as interesting as the exterior view led me to expect; it gave me the impression of a Chinese joss-house, with all the little paper devils turned into tin saints.



A BACHELOR MOVING

would make splendid gargoyles to carry off the roof-water, although *mescal* would probably be more to their taste.

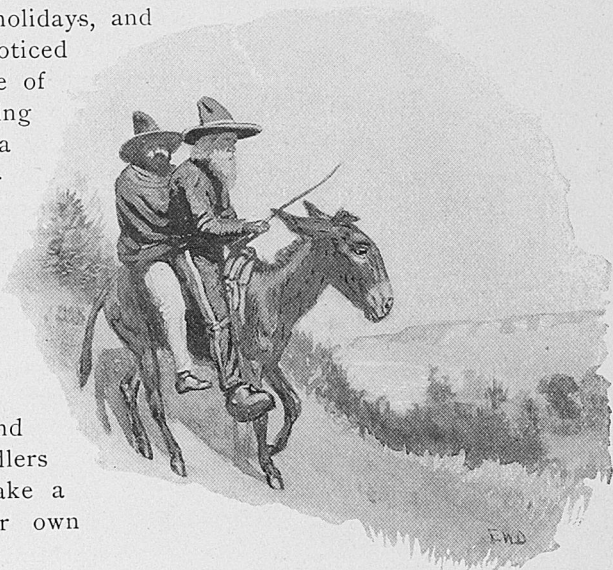
Sundays here are always holidays, and while sitting in the plaza, I noticed a number of Mexicans, some of them carrying game-cocks, going into a passage leading to a large court in which a cock-fight was in progress. An immense grape-vine covered a part of the court, making a pleasant shade from which to watch the proceedings. The place was full of gayly blanketed and costumed natives, gathered around a ring in which several handlers were doing their best to make a match advantageous to their own champion.

Several handsome game-cocks were



A BANDIT

At the entrance were the usual number of beggars, who began, in a cringing sing-song, to beg for "*uno centavito, uno chiquito centavito.*" They were certainly worth that much, as a part of the exterior decoration, and some of their old heads



THREE OF A KIND

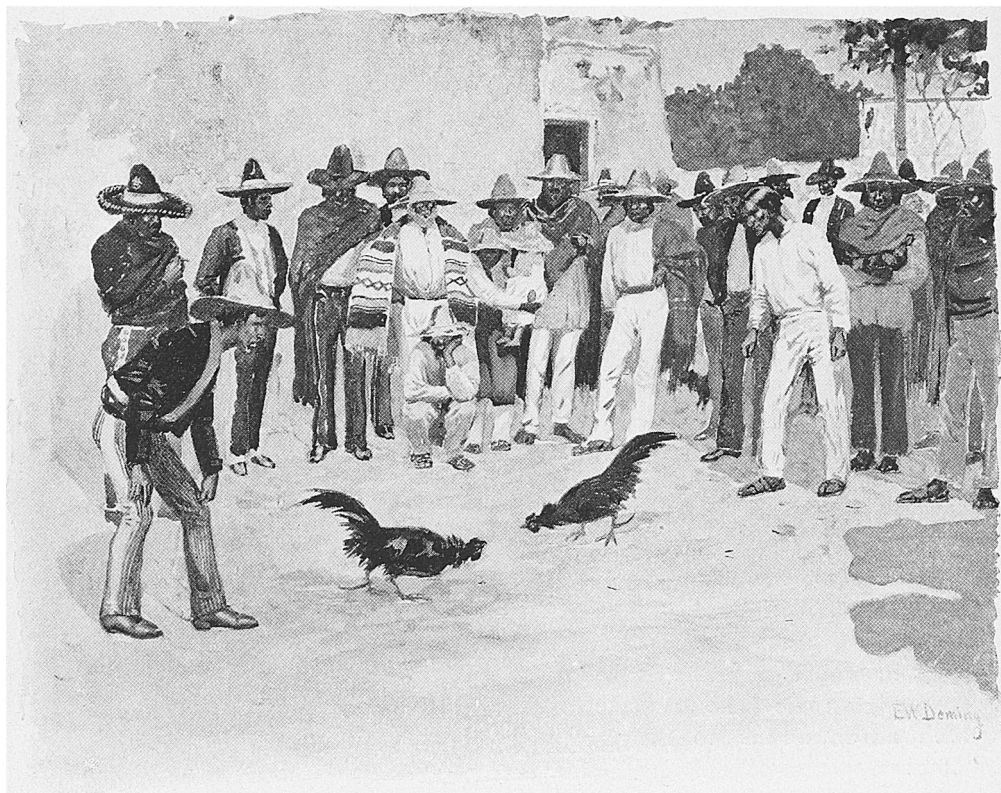


strutting about, as well as the cord on their legs would permit, each crowing now and then in a boastful fashion. Finally, there came a hush; a pair of birds had been matched, and bets made up, but before I could get near enough to see anything, the duel was over, one bird having been killed by a scythe-like knife tied to his opponent's left leg.

For the next fight I was in place. A beautiful pair of birds, one black and the other red, with feathers all standing up and necks outstretched, were facing, each following the other's every move with his eyes. In a second the cocks sprang at each other, striking viciously with their feet. Apparently, honors were easy. Then, again and again, they flew at one another, but the third time the red bird's head drooped, he staggered and fell dead. The black victor was picked up by his handler, who blew in his mouth and carried him off.

One day I made the acquaintance of a queer old candle-maker. In one end of his room, quite high up, was a small window, the light from which fell on the old man's head, lighting up his white hair and beard, while everything else remained in a subdued tone. He had a large hoop suspended from the rafters, and from it depended about two hundred candle-wicks, while underneath stood a jar of melted tallow, kept hot by a little fire.

The old man rotated the hoop slowly, meanwhile dipping up the hot tallow with a gourd, and pouring a little upon each wick as it passed. By the time that wick came around again it was cold and ready for another coating.



THE SUNDAY AFTERNOON COCK FIGHT